

U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Merritt Island National
Wildlife Refuge Complex
PO Box 2683
Titusville, FL 32781-2683

News Release



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New National Wildlife Refuge Proposed in Florida: Public Scoping Meetings Announced to Discuss the Proposed Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and a variety of public and private partners are advancing a collaborative approach to address landscape-scale land protection efforts to conserve wildlife and habitat in the greater Everglades landscape. This partnership is the Greater Everglades Partnership Initiative (Initiative).

"This initiative is aimed at preserving a rural working ranch landscape to protect and restore one of the great grassland and savanna landscapes of eastern North America. The partnerships being formed would protect and improve water quality north of Lake Okeechobee, restore wetlands, and connect existing conservation lands and important wildlife corridors to support the Everglades restoration effort." - *U.S. Department of Interior Secretary Ken Salazar*

This partnership initiative would help conserve a rural working ranch landscape; protect and restore habitat; protect, improve, and restore water quality and wetlands benefiting residents and visitors in South Florida; and connect a matrix of existing conservation lands and important wildlife corridors, supporting Everglades restoration efforts. Three study areas have been defined within the greater Everglades landscape: (1) the Everglades headwaters area, (2) the

Fisheating Creek area, and (3) the area around Florida Panther NWR and the Caloosahatchee River. The Service is currently focused on the first study area.

Proposed Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area

The proposed Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area (NWRCA) is a proposed land conservation partnership between federal, Tribal, State, and local governments; ranchers and other landowners; non-governmental conservation organizations; area residents; and other stakeholders to protect, restore, and conserve approximately 150,000+ acres of environmentally important natural habitat and associated wildlife in portions of Polk, Osceola, Indian River, Okeechobee, and Highlands counties in Central Florida, within a larger 4.5 million-acre landscape that extends from the southern outskirts of the Orlando metro area south through the Kissimmee River Valley to Lake Okeechobee, and southwest to Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge and Big Cypress Preserve.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partners would work with willing landowners to establish the proposed 150,000-acre Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area through several methods, including already-established conservation lands, fee simple purchases, conservation easements, leases, conservation and mitigation banks, lands set aside through habitat conservation plans, and/or cooperative agreements with landowners. The planning target is to work with partners and willing landowners to conserve approximately 50,000 acres in fee title acquisitions and 100,000 acres in less than fee title. The Service's policy is to work with willing landowners.

Four Public Scoping Meetings Scheduled

Four public scoping meetings have been scheduled in the area of the proposal to provide the public the opportunity to hear a presentation about the proposal and to ask questions and submit comments, ideas, and concerns. We invite all interested individuals, organizations, businesses, and agencies to join us at one or more of these meetings. Comments may also be submitted by email, mail, or fax (see the How to Submit Comments section below).

Date	Meeting Location	Address
1.26.2011 Wednesday 6:00-9:00 pm	Kissimmee Civic Center	201 East Dakin Ave Kissimmee, FL 34741
2.4.2011 Friday 6:00-9:00 pm	Sebring Civic Center	355 West Center Ave Sebring, FL 33870
2.9.2011 Wednesday 6:00-9:00 pm	Okeechobee High School	2800 Hwy 441 N Okeechobee, FL 34972
2.10.2011 Thursday 6:00-9:00 pm	Vero Beach High School Main Campus Cafeteria	1707 16 th St Vero Beach, FL 32960

What is the Schedule for the Proposal?

We are in the early stages of the project and are requesting input from the public. After this public scoping phase, we will use the comments gathered to help us develop a Land Protection Plan and associated National Environmental Policy (NEPA) document. We will then return to the public to request comments on the document and the more detailed proposal. Four main planning phases are outlined for this proposal, as listed.

Planning Phase	Estimated Dates
Conduct Public Scoping Meetings	January-February 2011
Develop Draft Land Protection Plan and NEPA Document	March-May 2011
Request Public Review and Comment on Proposal	June 2011
Develop Final Plan	August-September 2011

How to Get More Information?

For more information on this proposal and to view a map of the study area, please visit: <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/greatereverglades/>.

For more information on the Greater Everglades Partnership Initiative and to view a map of all three study areas, please see the Fact Sheet at: <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/greatereverglades/pdf/GreaterEvergladesFactsheet.pdf>.

To view the recent press release from earlier this month, please visit:
<http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/Salazar-Announces-Initiative-to-Conserve-Working-Lands-and-Wildlife-Habitat-in-the-Everglades-Headwaters.cfm>.

To get on the mailing list for the proposed Everglades Headwaters NWRCA, please fill out and scan/email back or mail in this form:
<http://www.fws.gov/southeast/greatareverglades/pdf/MailingListRequest.pdf>.

How to Submit Comments?

To comment on the proposal,

- please send email to: EvergladesHeadwatersProposal@fws.gov;
- please send mail to: Everglades Headwaters Proposal, PO Box 2683, Titusville, FL 32781-2683;
- please fax to: 321.861.1276; and/or
- please attend one of the public scoping meetings.

We request that scoping comments be received by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by **February 28, 2011** to ensure their consideration in the development of the Land Protection Plan and NEPA document that will outline the detailed proposal.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 150 million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses the more than 550 management units, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 37 wetland management districts, 70 national fish hatcheries, 65 fishery resource offices, and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

